

Johnson administration evicts migrant families from Chicago shelters while promoting “reparations”

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20 June 2024

On June 10, almost immediately following the end of classes at Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, a former teacher and Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) staff member, moved forward with the eviction of migrants from city-run shelters. The evictions by the Johnson administration are part of a general attack on immigrants by the Democratic Party as it turns to the right in search of an alliance with Republicans on war in the Middle East, Europe and Asia.

The city reports around 970 migrants have already been evicted from shelters. More than 120 members of families were to be evicted by June 18, with another 4,500 who had previously received exemptions to face eviction in the coming weeks, according to WTTW.

Once evicted, migrants are able to return to a downtown “landing zone,” where they may reapply for a spot in the shelter, provided there is space available. Of those already evicted, 554 have applied to be readmitted to the shelter system, with 536 ultimately reentering.

Asylum-seeking migrant families with children in school had been exempted from the 60-day shelter limit Johnson imposed last November. Evictions of single men and women from city shelters began in mid-March. Though the Johnson administration had initially planned to evict families during the school year, advocates for immigrants and the homeless pleaded with Johnson to wait until the end of the school year in order to give the children some stability in their schooling. The mayor no doubt conceded this demand primarily to avoid protests, including any independent action taken by teachers to defend migrant students and families.

Alyssa Phillips, an attorney for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, spoke to the *Chicago Tribune*, “Going through this eviction process is stressful and very challenging for them.”

The treatment of migrant families and especially the evictions are widely opposed by Chicago Public Schools teachers, who have complained that the CTU silences their criticisms on social media channels. One CPS teacher wrote on Instagram:

Can we talk about CTU...? They not only refused to oppose the evictions but also muted me on our members only page when I posted once a day with new info to try and educate teachers by dosing info in small parts from the

history leading to this moment, to US policy, to the current conditions and government imposed barriers for people’s independence, to spending priorities, to NYC’s union opposition of the same policy, and more. ... They also refused to ask a commenter to edit her wildly anti-Latino post or even remove the word “illegals” she used as a descriptor for a whole people. It’s bad.

Conditions in the city’s 17 migrant shelters are appalling. There are more than 6,500 migrants remaining in the hastily constructed and unsanitary shelter system, according to the *Tribune*. Many are overcrowded, and the conditions have led to large number of illnesses and even deaths, including a five-year-old boy who died on December 17 at a shelter in Pilsen. More recently, there was a measles outbreak at the same facility which required the dispatch of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) officials to keep it under control.

The Johnson administration has attempted to keep conditions in the shelters as unpleasant as possible with the goal of convincing migrants that they are unwelcome in Chicago. More than 43,000 migrants—40,000 from Venezuela alone—have arrived in Chicago since 2022, primarily bussed from Texas by fascistic Governor Greg Abbott.

Last week at a press conference, Johnson expressed his hope that migrants would move on to some other city, saying, “If there are beds that are available, they’ll stay where they are, but the ultimate goal is resettlement. These are temporary shelters. The standard and the expectation is that people can actually live sustainable, fruitful lives in Chicago or anywhere else in America and so choose.”

Most of the migrants are not currently eligible to work in the United States. Lacking the funds or connections to either find new places to live or leave the city, many are simply joining the ranks of the homeless. A yearly “point-in-time” count of homeless Chicagoans conducted in January found that 18,000 people were experiencing homelessness, three times more than the previous year.

Additionally, a CPS count of students in temporary living situations found a record 23,470 such students in May, 46 percent more than in 2023. Though CPS is supposed to support

transportation for these students so they are able to stay at their schools, this can be impossible given the conditions migrant families confront. One family interviewed by CBS Chicago reported being moved into a shelter a one-and-a-half hour commute away from their old one in the Pilsen neighborhood.

Democratic Alderman Andre Vasquez, chair of the City Council's Committee on Immigrant and Refugee Rights, feigned confusion about Johnson and the Democratic Party's aims, saying, "When we have a mayor who talks about investing in people while actually evicting people, it just doesn't add up. The part that to me is puzzling is the governor, the mayor, and the Cook County Board president had an agreement on 15,000 beds throughout the end of the year—or at least even until the DNC."

According to Vasquez then, Johnson, with the backing of Cook County Board President and Democratic Party Chair Toni Preckwinkle and billionaire Gov. J.B. Pritzker, is evicting asylum seekers and intensifying the homelessness problem among an especially vulnerable population, despite having committed to maintaining nearly 9,000 more shelter spaces than are currently being occupied.

The city council's Latino Caucus, of which Vasquez is vice-chair, issued a letter calling on the mayor to end the 60-day eviction policy, noting "reports of new arrivals sheltering in parks and on the streets."

The evictions take place as the Johnson administration has deepened its orientation to the growth of far-right, anti-immigrant and chauvinist sentiments among black business owners and the upper middle class. One week after the beginning of migrant family evictions, Johnson announced the creation of a task force on reparations for "Black Chicagoans." The task force promises to examine "all policies that have harmed Black Chicagoans from the slavery era to present day and make a series of recommendations that will serve as appropriate remedies."

At a Juneteenth flag-raising ceremony, Johnson framed all recent political history as a result of anti-black racism saying:

The legacy of slavery, the aftermath, still echoes today. We saw it when previous administrations sold off public assets. We saw the harm when previous administrations closed black schools, and they shut down public housing, when they raided the pensions. These anti-black, anti-business endeavors ... have caused tremendous harm and pain.

Johnson claimed that reparations would "unlock the doors of prosperity to fully flow through the neighborhoods that have been disinvested in for decades."

He concluded his speech, "God bless the blackest city in the world." This is not simply the product of political and geographical ignorance but expresses the outlook of a privileged social layer that has embraced racial division and conflict. The WSWs has previously written on the Johnson's black nationalist politics, as well as the anti-immigrant and chauvinist views expressed by city council leaders, including Democratic Socialists

of America Ald. Jeanette Taylor and Ald. Jason Ervin.

Openly chauvinist views were expressed by Alderman Emma Mitts, who opposed resources for migrants during a city council debate in April, saying, "I don't see the black folks getting that kind of help." She continued, "English is supposed to be the American language. But, no, not now. Because you [won't] get a job if you don't speak bilingual. You're not qualified."

An article in the *TriiBE* publication highlighted the Johnson administration's claim to be the "blackest" in the city's history. Johnson boasts that his cabinet is 44 percent black, while African Americans comprise 29 percent of the city's population. He celebrates these appointments to one of the most corrupt municipal bodies in the US, having achieved nothing of note for the hundreds of thousands of working class families in the city while attacking the most vulnerable—homeless migrant families. This clearly expresses that, for the grasping upper middle class, "reparations" means the redistribution of power and positions at the top, among a privileged layer, who will dutifully carry out the vicious class policies of the city's wealthy.

Leading the reparations task force will be newly appointed Chief Equity Officer Carla Kupe, an attorney and Diversity-Equity-Inclusion consultant. Kupe will have a \$500,000 budget for this effort, which will no doubt be paid out to other connected "experts" and political allies. According to reported figures, a racial reparations program in north suburban Evanston appears to have resulted in housing payments or direct disbursements of \$25,000, totaling around \$3 million, to at most 120 people.

Those who oppose attacks on immigrants must draw the lesson that any fight for the rights of migrants and asylum seekers must break completely with the Democratic Party and its pseudoleft DSA faction. The struggle for the rights of migrants is the struggle for the rights of the working class as a whole, demonstrated so foully in the negative in the experience of the Johnson administration and the promotion of race-based nationalism in the service of the interests of the capitalist class, both large and small.



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